



# **University of Sheffield**

Institutional Review  
by the Quality Assurance Agency  
for Higher Education

December 2012

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## About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Sheffield. The review took place on 10 to 14 December 2012 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeff Bale
- Mr Steve Finch
- Ms Barbara Howell
- Mr James Freeman (student reviewer)
- Dr Ellie Clewlow (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Sheffield and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards<sup>1</sup>
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the [key findings](#) can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

In reviewing the University of Sheffield the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2012-13 are the First Year Student Experience and Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and the institution is required to elect, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> Background information about the University of Sheffield is given at the end of this report. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for [Institutional Review](#) of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland<sup>3</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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<sup>1</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

<sup>2</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about the University of Sheffield

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University of Sheffield.

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the University of Sheffield.

- Measures to reward and support teaching excellence, including Senate Awards, funding for master's degrees, and promotion routes rewarding teaching excellence (paragraph 2.1.4).
- The institutional scheme of buddying Students' Union sabbaticals with senior managers (paragraph 2.3.2).
- The work of Student Services in enhancing the student experience through their use of student feedback (paragraph 2.3.7).
- The appointment of a Disability Transition Officer to coordinate support for disabled students from application to graduation (paragraph 2.8.1).
- The provision of a residential orientation scheme to introduce international students to their university environment as part of the wider programme of induction (paragraph 2.9.2).
- The involvement of Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching in the processes for enhancing the quality of the student experience (paragraph 4.6).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following recommendations to the University of Sheffield.

- Establish systems, by the end of the academic year 2013-14, that monitor the duration of external examiner appointments and record the University's own staff appointed to external examiner roles so as to avoid reciprocity (paragraph 1.2.4).
- Ensure all departments share summaries of external examiner reports with students in the current academic year and make external examiner reports available in full to students from 2013-14 (paragraph 1.2.6).
- Strengthen and ensure consistency in the evaluation of placement learning by students and placement providers, and by the end of the academic year 2013-14 ensure these evaluations are considered in periodic review (paragraph 2.13.4).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms the following actions** that the University of Sheffield is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps being taken by the University in cooperation with the Students' Union to improve student satisfaction with personal tutoring (paragraph 2.2.2).
- The implementation of the Estates Development Plan to incorporate consideration of social space in future capital developments (paragraph 2.2.4).
- The establishment of a University working group reviewing student engagement in accordance with *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (paragraph 2.3.3).
- The proposed steps by the University to share module evaluations with students more widely (paragraph 2.3.6).
- The University's steps to clarify the policy on the status of individuals who may sign collaborative agreements and ensure consistent implementation (paragraph 2.11.4).
- The action being taken by the University to align the faculty learning and teaching strategies with the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy 2011-16 (paragraph 4.3).

## Student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

The University places a high value on student engagement and works closely with the Students' Union to ensure that students are partners in their education. The University employs a wide range of mechanisms to involve students in quality assurance and enhancement and to gain feedback on their experience. Students felt informed about the actions taken by the University in response to their input.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx)

## About the University of Sheffield

The University of Sheffield received its Royal Charter in 1905. The University's vision statement is to 'be one of the best universities in the world, renowned for the excellence, impact and distinctiveness both of its research and its research-led learning and teaching.' The University's approach puts a strong emphasis on the positive interaction between learning, teaching and research.

The University is made up of five faculties located in Sheffield, with a sixth International Faculty located in Thessaloniki in Greece. The five Sheffield faculties are comprised of 50 academic departments or schools and the International Faculty has three academic departments and one faculty-wide division. For its five Sheffield faculties in the academic year 2011-12 there were 22,691 students registered on full-time programmes and a further 3,114 students registered on part-time programmes. The postgraduate research student population totalled 2,285, or around nine per cent of the total student population. The International Faculty had 905 registered students in 2011-12.

The University was last reviewed in 2007 when it received confidence judgements in the current and likely future of both the management of academic standards and the management of the quality of learning opportunities available to students.

Shortly after the last QAA review, the University introduced a new faculty structure, reducing the number of faculties from seven to five, and extended the powers of the faculties for strategic development and resource management. A number of faculty positions were created to support the structure, including the appointment of three faculty directors in each faculty in the areas of learning and teaching, research and innovation, and operations.

Another major change during this period was to integrate City College, Thessaloniki, as the International Faculty of the University. While City College remains a private establishment and retains legal responsibility for matters covered by Greek law, the International Faculty operates alongside the other faculties in academic matters relating to all aspects of taught programmes and quality assurance arrangements. The mission of the International Faculty recognises its role in recruiting and integrating students from across the wider Balkan region and this is reflected by in a number of distributed learning arrangements and collaborative partnerships.

The University has identified changes to funding and its impact on many aspects of higher education as a key challenge. It is also concerned to deliver on widening participation targets, develop strategies for the future of postgraduate taught education, and to provide the public information required by an increasing variety of stakeholders.

# Explanation of the findings about the University of Sheffield

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.<sup>5</sup>

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#)<sup>6</sup> is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.<sup>7</sup>

## 1 Academic standards

### Outcome

The academic standards at the University of Sheffield **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1 The review team found that the University has clearly defined mechanisms in its approval and review of academic modules and programmes to ensure alignment with *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and other relevant national subject benchmarks.

1.1.1 For all new programmes and modules, the University provides guidance on the FHEQ, credit and programme structures and programme specifications to ensure alignment with appropriate levels of the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. The review team found that approval documents and programme specifications consistently referenced these documents. The team found a comprehensive and well organised guide to programme regulations.

1.1.2 Programme specifications are readily accessible via the website and department handbooks, and contain detailed specifications of interest and help to students.

1.1.3 The University Code of Practice for External Examiners requires all examiners to make reference to the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements in their reports and the team found evidence that this consistently happened in practice.

### Use of external examiners

1.2 The role of the external examiner is clearly defined in documentation and the external examiner reports made an effective contribution towards the management of academic standards.

1.2.1 The University Code of Practice for External Examiners clearly defines the role of external examiners, principles for nomination and appointment, reports required and feedback on reports. The role and process of external examining is kept under regular review.

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<sup>5</sup> The full body of evidence used to compile the report is not published. However it is available on request for inspection. Please contact QAA Reviews Group.

<sup>6</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx)

<sup>7</sup> See note 4.

1.2.2 At least one external examiner is appointed to all taught programmes and the faculty is responsible for nominating those appointments. The appointments are approved at faculty level and, in the case of the International Faculty, appointments are approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching. The team confirmed that the University and faculties keep a list of external examiner appointments.

1.2.3 The University acknowledged that some departments may have difficulty in appointing an external examiner with whom no collaborative research had taken place. As a consequence, the Code of Practice states that the University would not normally appoint as external examiner anyone where there were 'reciprocal arrangements involving cognate programmes at another institution' to allow the exceptional approval for conflict of interest cases. These cases are approved by the appropriate faculty officer or the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Learning and Teaching in the case of collaborative provision. It was clear that the conflict of interest cases were subject to additional scrutiny. However, as the University does not keep records of its own academic staff engaged in external examiner roles at other institutions, it was less clear how reciprocity could be confirmed.

1.2.4 The Code of Practice for External Examiners expects the period of service to normally be four years with an exceptional one year extension. The review team was advised that the faculty is responsible for the maintenance of tenure through oversight of the external examiner database. However, the team noted that three external examiners had been appointed since 2005-06. In conclusion, the review team **recommends** that the University establishes systems, by the end of the academic year 2013-14, that monitor the duration of external examiner appointments and record the University's own staff appointed to external examiner roles so as to avoid reciprocity.

1.2.5 External examiners are involved in the ongoing development of programmes through attendance at department Exam Boards and the annual report they submit. Departments respond to examiners on issues raised and there is a faculty-level annual overview of comments from externals for consideration at University level by the Quality and Scrutiny Sub-Committee (QSSC).

1.2.6 The student written submission (SWS) and the students met by the review team suggested the guidance and practice of sharing of external examiners reports with students is variable. The team found limited evidence that reports were shared with students at Student-Staff Committee (SSC) and Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) meetings, and no evidence that the full reports were shared. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** the University ensures all departments share summaries of external examiner reports with students in the current academic year and make external examiner reports available in full to students from 2013-14.

## **Assessment and standards**

1.3 The University's procedures for the design, approval, monitoring and review of its assessment strategies were effective in allowing students opportunity to demonstrate that they had attained the learning outcomes for their awards. The University produces comprehensive guidance and information for students on assessment.

1.3.1 The Principles of Assessment and the Principles of Feedback frame and inform assessment practice. These address a number of factors including quality and timeliness of feedback. All staff are aware of the principles. There is a comprehensive set of more detailed information to support assessment practice, including the design of assessment in new programmes, use of technology in assessment, feedback, exam procedures, exam boards and the processing and publication of results. These documents link to the relevant sections of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code).



1.3.2 The SWS suggested there were issues relating to the timeliness and depth of feedback. However, the review team heard from students that they were generally happy with the turnaround times for feedback, although there were some concerns in relation of the level, detail and legibility of feedback. The team learnt from staff and periodic review documentation that there were systems in place to monitor the feedback process. The team also learnt that the University planned to work further with the small number of departments that continue to score lower student satisfaction for assessment and feedback as compared with both the University and sector more widely.

1.3.3 The review team heard from students of some concerns over the full use of grading scales. Marking is currently reported on a 100 point scale and the University was aware of the concern. The team learnt of steps being taken to encourage staff to use the whole scale.

1.3.4 The University also produces comprehensive guidance on the provision of key information to students. The review team found student handbooks to accurately reflect the University's guidance on assessment policies, to include sections on the criterion reference marking scheme, and links to the Student Service Information Desk for additional information on regulations and policies relating to exam conventions and academic appeals. Students that the review team met said that the requirements of assessment were made clear to them.

1.3.5 The University runs staff development workshops on assessment practice and The Certificate in Learning and Teaching which covers these issues for new staff.

## **Setting and maintaining programme standards**

1.4 The University's procedures for approving new programmes, and the monitoring and review of existing programmes, ensure that academic standards are set and maintained at the appropriate level.

1.4.1 The approval of new programmes is a two-stage process, with approval in principle followed by full approval. Various professional services provide input into programme planning and relevant external consideration is sought at this stage. The new programme form is designed to seek the necessary preliminary information about a new programme, including the role of professional bodies and a section for comment from external consultations. The programme approval process includes a member from a different faculty on each faculty approval panel.

1.4.2 Learning and Teaching Services (LeTS) oversees the processes for approval of new modules for taught programmes with the Faculty Director of Learning and Teaching, or a deputy, giving final approval for modules delivered by the faculties. From 2012-13 cross-faculty taught modules and programmes have been approved separately to the faculty structure through the Board of Extra-Faculty Provision, which is a new subcommittee of QSSC.

1.4.3 Annual Reflection was introduced in 2008-9, replacing the Annual Review of Learning and Teaching. Departments consider a number of key performance indicators in a 'structured conversation' between the department and faculty learning and teaching officers and the LeTS officers to produce a brief report, which is then discussed at the faculty LTC. Although the review team could not see evidence of the structured conversations, as those meetings are not minuted, the team considered that the Annual Reflection reports met the requirements of the new process. Issues raised as part of Annual Reflection are discussed at the various faculty LTCs. An overview report on aspects relating to quality assurance is then considered at QSSC, and those on enhancement at ESSC. Both reports are sent to LTC. Feedback from the departments on the process was generally positive.

1.4.4 In 2009-10, the University has introduced a new Learning and Teaching Policy and Guidance Review; a meeting is held in the semester before the scheduled Periodic Review. The purpose of the review is to check that departments are implementing 'all University Learning and Teaching policies'.

1.4.5 The periodic review process is set out in a comprehensive document, Periodic Review Explained. Through a review of periodic review documentation the review team found that the aims and scope have been followed. The team further confirmed that the standard composition of the review panel usually conformed to the guidelines, although some exceptions were noted when only one external panel member was present or only one peer from a different department was in attendance.

1.4.6 In response to the periodic review, departments are expected to report on actions taken in their Annual Reflections and make comment at the faculty LTC. The review team confirmed that issues raised that relate to central University departments are passed on by LeTS. QSSC takes oversight of the periodic review on an annual basis. An overview of the Periodic Reviews undertaken in a given year is included in an annual report on quality assurance processes for Council.

### **Subject benchmarks**

1.5 The University makes appropriate use of subject benchmarks/qualification statements in the design, approval, delivery and review of its programmes, which informed the standard of the awards.

1.5.1 University guidance is given on the use of subject benchmark statements in the design of new programmes. Information on accrediting bodies is also required in the first stage of the programme approval process. Reflection on benchmark statements/ Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies reference points is part of the periodic review process, however, the team considered that more explicit use could be made of it.

1.5.2 Programme specifications refer to subject benchmarks/qualification statements, and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body frameworks, and reference the accredited qualification achieved as part of the award.

## 2 Quality of learning opportunities

### Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the University of Sheffield **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

### Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1 The University has an effective approach to supporting and enhancing professional standards for teaching and learning and has taken significant steps to support and reward teaching excellence.

2.1.1 There is a University-wide Staff Development Policy and the University is currently working on a Staff Professional Development Framework. Some faculties/departments have developed their own continuing professional development (CPD) policies.

2.1.2 All new lecturers are required to successfully complete the University's Certificate in Learning and Teaching programme, accredited by the Higher Education Academy, as part of their probationary period. There are institutional staff training opportunities such as the Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, and training in academic and pastoral care via a Supporting the Supporters programme. While engagement with CPD is not compulsory for established staff, and take-up can be variable in some faculties, the review team saw a range of evidence for tailored professional development opportunities at faculty and department level.

2.1.3 The University has taken significant steps to improve training for graduate teaching assistants. There is both central University training and department-specific training. Departments monitor compliance with required departmental training via a checklist form completed by students to ensure that all postgraduate research students with teaching duties undertake training. Records of students who have attended University-level training is provided to departments. The review team came across a limited number of examples where research students had taken on teaching before being trained. With the implementation of the Sheffield Teaching Assistant Programme, the University is deciding on a method of how to record and inform faculties of those who have completed training. Postgraduate research students commented positively about their training.

2.1.4 The University has taken significant steps to recognise and support teaching excellence. Senate Awards for Excellence in Learning and Teaching explicitly reward teaching excellence and encourage sharing of good practice. Recipients receive a grant, become Senate Fellows and attend a graduation ceremony. There is also support for those wishing to gain a master's degree in Education in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education. Exceptional Contribution Awards offer recognition following a successful Staff Review and Development Scheme outcome. There is also a promotion route to professorial level for teaching-only staff. The review team considered these measures to reward and support teaching excellence, including Senate Awards, funding for master's degrees, and promotion routes rewarding teaching excellence to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.1.5 The University operates a Staff Review and Development Scheme which is monitored by the University Executive Board. All relevant staff met by the review team had received training and undertaken a review in the previous year. Individual staff training needs in support of teaching can be discussed although the scope of the staff review is broader. The International Faculty operates a system of annual appraisals and process broadly similar to those at Sheffield.

2.1.6 All teaching staff are expected to undertake some form of peer-assisted developmental activity relating to learning and teaching known as an Annual Dialogue. This has a broader remit than peer observation and can include discussion in curriculum planning and assessment strategies. The University recognises that Annual Dialogue has not always been implemented consistently across departments and is taking steps to promote and monitor activity through LeTS and the staff review process.

2.1.7 The aim that all students have personal experience of research-led learning is one of the priority themes of the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy. This is reflected in the faculty learning and teaching strategies. There are a number of institution-wide initiatives to support this principle, including the Sheffield University Research Experience, a summer research placement for students to work with academic staff, and an intensive research experience lecture series called Inspiration and Co. The University is currently working to define and clarify further its approach to research-led learning and has set up a project group to examine other ways of bringing learning and research together.

## Learning resources

2.2 Overall, the review team considered that the planning of learning resources are appropriate to allow students to achieve the learning outcomes for their programmes.

2.2.1 There is institutional-level oversight of learning resources through the Learning and Teaching Committee, and the Enhancement Strategy Sub-Committee has oversight of key resource provision although budgets are devolved to faculties. Programme planning takes resources into account and requires consultation with professional services. The approval of collaborative partnerships agreements requires consideration of teaching and learning resources.

2.2.2 Students commented that there is some work to be done in improving the personal tutor system, particularly in terms of staff understanding of the role. A report and survey by the Students' Union suggests that there is some staff dissatisfaction with the role. The University acknowledges the need for greater consistency in the operation of the role and is taking steps to address this. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken by the University in cooperation with the Students' Union to improve student satisfaction with personal tutoring.

2.2.3 The University recognises that there are some issues in relation to equity of experience and support for dual degrees. Provision has been decreased and coordinators have been appointed to ensure that students on these programmes have a sense of identity. The University's Annual Reflection Report for 2011-12 identified further areas for attention.

2.2.4 The review team noted the responsiveness the University has shown to improving lower National Student Survey scores in learning resources. There has been significant investment in new and refurbished infrastructure. More specifically the University has implemented measures for seeking feedback on library provision and the team found that students were generally positive about the library provision. The University is working with the Students' Union to improve the provision of room space and resources during periods of high demand, as well as responding to concerns about the loss of social learning space by ensuring that all new developments take this into account. The review team **affirms** the implementation of the Estates Development Plan to incorporate consideration of social space in future capital developments.

## Student voice

2.3 Students are represented at all levels of the University. Whilst there is some limited evidence that not all elements of this have been consistently implemented, the University has committed to reviewing this. There are some initiatives of student involvement and participation in quality assurance and enhancement that the review team considered to be examples of good practice. Whilst the actual mechanisms used to get feedback varied across faculties, students repeatedly stated they felt listened to by the University. Student Services seemed particularly prepared to seek and use feedback in quality assurance.

2.3.1 Students are represented on University-wide committees and this includes postgraduate research students on the Doctoral and Researcher Development Committee and QSSC. There is a Code of Good Practice for Student Course Representatives in Departments and Faculties prepared jointly by the Students' Union and the University's Teaching and Learning Committee covering representation, membership, recruitment and training. Students are represented on faculty learning and teaching committees and on appropriate departmental committees, for example, teaching committees.

2.3.2 There is a buddying scheme between Students' Union Officers and Pro Vice-Chancellors about which student representatives commented favourably. The review team considered this to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.3.3 The Code of Good Practice asks that two undergraduate and one postgraduate taught student are represented on faculty learning and teaching committees. While the review team found most of these committees have student representation, it was not always clear whether Student Ambassadors were used in place of elected student members. Students' Union data suggested that implementation of student representatives at a department level was variable. This is to be followed up as part of the remit of a working group reviewing the University's approach to student engagement. The review team **affirms** the establishment of a University working group reviewing student engagement in accordance with *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code.

2.3.4 Departments have Student-Staff Committees (SSCs) with student representatives from each programme year. Each committee has a Staff Committee Coordinator. There are also Faculty Student Forums which draw on SSC members and include postgraduate research students. Students commented positively on these arrangements.

2.3.5 Departments have arrangements in place to gather student feedback on modules and programmes. They use a variety of methods as appropriate to the department, student mix and point in the programme. There are no standard sets of questions although some faculty-wide approaches are emerging. While students considered that they saw the results of actions from their feedback, the review team was unclear as to how comparability of feedback across the University was ensured, particularly given the University's focus on feedback to check delegated structures are working.

2.3.6 The University suggests module feedback should either be discussed at SSCs or LTCs with students present. The review team saw evidence of Learning Teaching Committees in departments receiving module evaluations but not all SSCs consider module feedback. The University has recently asked LeTS to consider how outcomes/module evaluations can be shared more widely. The review team **affirms** the proposed steps by the University to share module evaluations with students more widely.

2.3.7 The Student Services Department survey all students each year to find out how satisfied they are with University services and what improvements they feel could be made. The results are published in an annual student satisfaction survey. There is a Service

Improvement Team to oversee the work to improve the quality of the Department's services. A wide range of separate mechanisms are used to evaluate service provision. The review team concluded that there was good evidence for use of student feedback and considered the work of Student Services in enhancing the student experience through their use of student feedback to be a **feature of good practice**.

### **Management information is used to improve quality and standards**

2.4 The review team found that effective use is made of management information to safeguard standards and to promote the enhancement of learning opportunities.

2.4.1 The University's management information system, MI View, allows heads of departments and faculty officers access to relevant management information. The Equality and Diversity Board monitors and evaluates effectiveness of provision.

2.4.2 The Annual Reflection process incorporates a range of key performance indicator data, the analysis of which is used to structure conversations around areas of concern. The reports of these meetings produced by LeTS only record information highlighted as a risk and do not record the full range of key performance indicators.

2.4.3 The outcomes of Learning and Teaching Policy and Guidance Reviews, which takes place before a periodic review, are a potential source of management information on implementation of and feedback on University Learning and Teaching policies. The review team found little evidence of their reference in periodic review reports to show these outcomes feeding through, however, the team did note that summary reports of Policy and Guidance Reviews are sent to QSSC.

### **Admission to the University**

2.5 The University's policies and procedures for admissions and induction are clear and accessible. There are effective processes in place to monitor and review the operation of the admissions system.

2.5.1 The Student Admissions Policy encompasses both undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The policy clearly states the University's expectations/obligations of applicants and outlines the responsibilities and roles of those involved in the admission process. Staff involved in the admission process are appropriately trained and receive relevant information to be effective in their role.

2.5.2 While the admission policies of the faculties are aligned, the arrangements for the International Faculty are different in that their staff are not line managed by the central Admissions Service. The review team found that the admissions policy of the International Faculty was broadly aligned to the University's policy.

2.5.3 Information for both applicants and offer holders is readily available from the Applicant Information Desks. The Admissions Service provides feedback to unsuccessful applicants.

2.5.4 The Admissions and Outreach Sub-committee monitors and reviews central and departmental policies with respect of taught programmes using a range of data to judge its effectiveness. Postgraduate research admission policies are reviewed by the Doctoral Research and Development Committee.

## **Complaints and appeals**

2.6 The University's complaints and appeals procedures are effective. There is consistent support for students, cooperation with the Students' Union, and clear information for staff and students. The team found well-evidenced monitoring and review processes in place.

2.6.1 Student complaints and appeals information is comprehensive, and the University makes procedures and documents readily available. Comprehensive information is also available for staff handling complaints and appeals, and relevant staff are trained. Students were aware of where they could find the information. There is a dedicated Student Complaints and Appeals Office that provides a one-stop shop to deal with and advise on complaints, appeals and disciplinary cases for all students. The Office has a good working relationship with the Students' Union's Student Advice Centre.

2.6.2 International Faculty procedures differ slightly but are broadly aligned to the Sheffield campus policy. International Faculty students can refer a case to University level. The policy also makes it clear that general University regulations on complaints and appeals apply to International Faculty students for University level procedures.

2.6.3 University Regulations relating to disciplinary procedures are reviewed by the QSSC. A document on the 'points of principles' arising from hearings over the academic year is circulated to departments. Data on complaints and appeals is received by Senate in a Discipline Report.

## **Career advice and guidance**

2.7 The University has a comprehensive strategic approach to career education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) and there have been significant attempts to embed careers and enterprise into programmes of study. The University is helping students to record extra-curricular achievements and skills through the Sheffield Graduate Award, the Skills for Work Certificate, and the Higher Education Achievement Report. There is clear evidence that careers and enterprise services monitor and review their activities and their overall effectiveness are evaluated in line with other student services.

2.7.1 CEIAG is thoroughly incorporated within institutional strategic documents, and the University has a separate employability strategy. Faculties and departments also have specific strategies in place. An Enterprise Education Mission and Vision Strategy 2012-16 has recently been approved. The Careers Service and University of Sheffield Enterprise (USE) both form strands of Student Services, have cross committee membership and can jointly develop initiatives. USE was established to encourage and support enterprise skills within programmes as well as offering support to recent graduates.

2.7.2 The Careers Service provides information tailored to pre-registration and different stages of student experience and sub-groups of students. Taught students were generally positive about the service and research students were also positive about careers opportunities and information. For the International Faculty, there are equivalent services although the careers services are not directly managed by the University's central Student Services. Departments within the International Faculty are employer focussed and there is an Industrial Advisory Board. Students were generally satisfied with the careers services available there.

2.7.3 Significant steps have been taken to embed careers and enterprise skills into the curriculum. Both the Careers Service and USE run modules and some departments offer their own career management modules.

2.7.4 The Sheffield Graduate Development Programme (the Programme) seeks to help students articulate transferable skills and attributes of the concept of The Sheffield Graduate. Departments can choose to implement the Programme through specialised employment skills modules, personal tutors or embedding within the broader curriculum. The Sheffield Graduate Award seeks to reward student involvement in a range of validated extra-curricular activities. The Award has been recognised by some leading graduate employers. There is also a Skills for Work Certificate to recognise employability skills developed through work experience.

2.7.5 Wider policy implementations are monitored by the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy reports. Programme monitoring activities (Annual Reflection, Periodic Review and Policy and Guidance Review) are used to ensure that departments are implementing strategies such as the Sheffield Graduate Development Programme. The Careers Service is part of the Student Services feedback infrastructure which includes surveys, focus groups and other consultative measures.

## **Supporting disabled students**

2.8 The University manages the quality of learning opportunities for disabled students effectively. There is a dedicated central team and individual contacts with departments. The SWS confirms that support for disabled students is extensive. The review team was satisfied that the University has effective oversight and that the University's practice is aligned with the relevant expectations of the Quality Code.

2.8.1 There is a comprehensive and well integrated range of support services, including a Disability and Dyslexic Support Service, Disability Liaison Officers within academic departments, and a Disability Transitions Officer aimed at improving the transition of disabled students both into and out of the University and building on the University's disability outreach work. The review team considered the appointment of a Disability Transition Officer to coordinate support for disabled students from application to graduation to be a **feature of good practice**.

2.8.2 Data relating to specific groups of students is provided to faculty officers and heads of departments through the University's management information system and this data is used in the Annual Reflection process and by other relevant bodies such as the Equality and Diversity Board.

## **Supporting international students**

2.9 The University manages the quality of learning opportunities for international students effectively. A range of support is specifically available. The University has high external scores for international student satisfaction.

2.9.1 The University has a Code of Good Practice for international students and has recently published an Internationalisation Strategy for 2012-17 which has as one of its themes 'developing a truly international University community'.

2.9.2 There is a comprehensive range of information for international students from application to graduation and staff development is provided to support international students. Five days before the Welcome Week, the University runs a residential orientation programme specifically to help international students meet staff, familiarise themselves with the University and to learn about living and studying in Sheffield. The review team considered the provision of a residential orientation scheme to introduce international students to their university environment as part of the wider programme of induction to be a **feature of good practice**.



2.9.3 The Students' Union commented that more could be done to support the academic transition of international students in the UK. This theme has also been identified by the University through Annual Reflection and periodic review reports. Some departments provide a structured programme of support for international students, including workshops on study skills while the International Faculty provides an academic study skills module for new students. The University provides comprehensive information for international students during their orientation week, with an increasing academic element in induction. However, the review team considered the centrally provided information for international students did not cover such aspects of academic study in detail.

### **Supporting postgraduate research students**

2.10 The review team found that overall the University provides appropriate guidance and support to enable postgraduate students to complete their programmes of study and to enable staff involved in research programmes to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.10.1 There is a comprehensive Code of Practice providing information at all stages of a PhD which includes responsibilities of the student, supervisor and department. There is a Doctoral Development Programme website that provides a wide range of information for students including information about training courses and links to online learning resources for research skills. There is a separate portal for supervisors which includes examples of good practice. Research students commented that their transition and introduction to postgraduate research was thorough and were positive about the doctoral training programme and range of courses available.

2.10.2 All research students are allocated two supervisors and also have access to a personal tutor who is unconnected to the research project. Students are required to attend formal meetings with their supervisor every four to six weeks and records of these meetings are maintained by the student the supervisor. Records are also kept centrally by some departments and this is encouraged as good practice. Students confirmed that they all had access to someone fulfilling the role of a personal tutor and that departmental methods to monitor formal meetings with supervisors were effective.

2.10.3 Postgraduate research student representation is well established at department level with student representatives on Student-Staff Committees which, depending on the scale of the provision, may be postgraduate research alone in focus, or combined with postgraduate taught provision. The University has recently established Faculty Forums that meet each semester in which each department has research student representatives.

2.10.4 The University maintains oversight of student progress through the Annual Progress Reporting cycle. Progress review forms are completed by supervisors and unsatisfactory progress is reported to the faculty officer. Generic issues about supervision and support are referred to the Head of Department by the Research Degree Support Team.

2.10.5 The review team found that there are effective mechanisms in place for the oversight of postgraduate research provision. Academic oversight is provided by the Doctoral and Researcher Development Committee while scrutiny of generic issues arising from external examiners reports on PhD theses is the responsibility of Research and Innovation Services.

### **Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements**

2.11 The review found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of the University's collaborative arrangements is managed effectively to enable students to achieve their awards.

2.11.1 The University's policy and approach to collaborative arrangements is set out in a collaborative framework. Programmes are approved in principle by the faculty and the collaborative arrangement and a partner is then approved by the Committee for Collaborative Provision. Faculties are then responsible for the academic content and ongoing monitoring of standards.

2.11.2 The University has a number of collaborative arrangements which are defined in the Collaborative Framework. The proportion of credits which must be delivered by the University on its collaborative degree programmes is set out in the the University's Regulations. The University has recently introduced a new category of 'distributed learning' defined as those programmes delivered wholly by University of Sheffield staff at the premises of partner institutions. This new category was introduced in order to distinguish between different types of collaborative programme operated by the International Faculty. The University is of the view that some collaborative distance learning programmes in other faculties may now fall under the new category of distributed learning and has agreed to undertake a further review of the categories of all collaborative programmes to ensure that there is consistency in terminology across provision.

2.11.3 Overall coordination of support for the development of collaborative teaching partnerships is provided by the Academic Support Team in LeTS (for UK links) and by the International Relations Office (for international links). Due Diligence checks are carried out on all proposed partner institutions. The accuracy of publicity material and other information contained on partner websites is checked by academic staff in the collaborating University department. Collaborative agreements are signed by a Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University. The University maintains an up to date register of all types of collaborative arrangements.

2.11.4 The review team scrutinised a number of agreements and considered them to be comprehensive with a clear statement of the responsibilities of both parties. The team found, however, that some agreements had been signed by various officers of the University including Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Director of Finance and Resources, and the Head of Operations in Research and Innovation Services. The Committee for Collaborative Provision recommended in June 2012 that all collaborative agreements with national or international partners should be signed by a Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University. The review team **affirms** the University's steps to clarify the policy on the status of individuals who may sign collaborative agreements and ensure consistent implementation.

2.11.5 There is annual monitoring of collaborative arrangements by the University department which includes comments on quality assurance such as module evaluation questionnaires, and external examiner reports and follow-up action plans. These reports feed into the Annual Reflection exercise and are discussed in the annual report to the Committee for Collaborative Provision.

### **Flexible, distributed and e-learning**

2.12 The University has a small number of distance and distributed programmes. The review team was able to confirm that the quality of learning opportunities delivered through these arrangements are managed effectively.

2.12.1 The University defines distance learning as a programme where the majority of it is delivered via e-resources with some face-to-face teaching. The University has recently published a new e-learning strategy in which e-learning is described as technology enhanced learning.

2.12.2 Distance learning programmes are delivered by online discussions, tutorial groups, email and telephone tutorials plus lectures and seminars at annual residentials. The University defines distributed learning programmes as those where all the teaching is delivered by University of Sheffield staff. The University may use the facilities of another academic institution but the design, delivery, assessment and student support is provided by University staff. The partner institution may provide IT and library resources, administrative support, and facilities for teaching. Some distributed learning programmes are delivered in other locations such as hotels, where in some cases the University provides administrative support.

2.12.3 Distributed learning programmes are subject to the same due diligence checks as collaborative provision. Academic departments are responsible for checking the suitability of locations. Arrangements are subject to written agreements with partners that provide local facilities.

### **Work-based and placement learning**

2.13 The review team found that the quality of learning opportunities delivered through placement learning is effective.

2.13.1 A number of degrees have a mandatory placement requirement (for example medicine), while others have evolved to include the option for a 'Year in Industry'. There is also a scheme managed by the Careers Service whereby students can find their own placement, which if approved and completed, amends the degree title to 'with employment experience'.

2.13.2 There is a University guidelines document that sets out the main principles for departments to consider when setting up placements. It is written to align with the Quality Code. There are various appendices and checklists for approving new placement opportunities and placement learning agreements. Placement agreements are sent to external providers. There is also a Placements Guidance Manual for departments. Departments also produce their own placement handbooks for students undertaking placement learning which includes year abroad programmes. The review team considered the University documentation with regard to placement learning to be comprehensive.

2.13.3 The placement guidelines state that departments should collect feedback from all students on their placement learning experiences and are strongly encouraged to obtain feedback from placement providers. It also states that departments might wish to consider the periodic review of placement learning opportunities.

2.13.4 The review team found that there were examples of good practice in relation to obtaining feedback from students on their placement experience, however, this was not systematic across all departments that offered placement learning opportunities. Some departments apparently obtained student feedback in 2012 in response to requests for information as part of the Institutional Review visit, but there had been no equivalent documented record of such analyses in previous years. Likewise, whilst some departments that offered placements had obtained feedback from placement providers, this was not consistent across the University. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University should strengthen and ensure consistency in the evaluation of placement learning by students and placement providers, and by the end of the academic year 2013-14 ensure these evaluations are considered in Periodic Review.

## Student charter

2.14 The University has the equivalent of a student charter which applies to all students. This is supplemented by a proposition statement. The charter is updated on an annual basis. The SWS confirmed that, in general, the University adheres to the commitments it makes to its students.

2.14.1 Our Commitment, which represents the student charter, was developed jointly with the Students' Union and academic staff. It is set out as a website which provides comprehensive links to other websites and University policies as well as useful time-sensitive information.

2.14.2 There is a supplementary Our Proposition statement for undergraduate students which summarises the responsibilities of the University and its students. An equivalent statement for research students has been produced in draft form and there are plans to produce a separate statement for postgraduate taught students.

## 3 Information about learning opportunities

### Outcome

The information about learning opportunities produced by the University of Sheffield **meets UK expectations**. The intended audience finds the information about the learning opportunities offered is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1 The team considered the University to have a good range of accurate information published in an accessible format. The SWS confirmed that students are mostly satisfied that their experience matches their expectations built on the basis of information provided by the University.

3.2 The University provides comprehensive and wide-ranging information about many aspects of its provision which is readily available and well structured through the University's website. Students that the review team met were confident about where to go to find the information they needed. The team found that key policies, such as complaints and appeals, were clear, detailed and readily available.

3.3 Some students made the review team aware of some issues related to the accuracy of information associated to module choices. The University acknowledged that some information on modules in the prospectus may have been out of date by the time the student undertook the module. To further improve consistency in student data, communications regarding programme information now fall under a single manager and team, so that web and print information is produced in an integrated way.

3.4 Student handbooks provided accurate and comprehensive guidance including guidance on assessment. Programme specifications are verified by the department on an annual basis in a process managed by Learning and Teaching Services. With a few minor exceptions, the review team found the programme specifications to be kept up to date.

3.5 The review team found limited evidence that external examiners' reports were shared with students through SSCs and faculty teaching and learning committees, and no evidence that full reports were shared.

3.6 The academic department is responsible for the checking and sign-off of academic information. The process is managed centrally by the marketing department. The responsibility of signing off the prospectus rests with the PVC. Academic staff in collaborating University departments are responsible for checking the accuracy of publicity material and other information contained on partner websites.

## 4 Enhancement of learning opportunities

### Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the University of Sheffield **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

4.1 The University has a structured and strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities across the institution. The University is committed to future enhancements to be led by both the institutional and faculty learning and teaching strategies.

4.2 The University has developed a new structure of six faculties with extensive new powers for resource management and strategic development, which is designed to ensure the delivery and enhancement of quality. Considerable powers have been given to the Faculty Directors of Learning and Teaching. The International Faculty is also integrated into the quality enhancement regime of the University. Faculty learning and teaching committee terms of reference that the team saw all included management of enhancement of the student experience. The review team saw evidence of a number of faculty-based enhancement projects and evidence that faculty initiatives are monitored and evaluated against the University Learning and Teaching Strategy by the Enhancement and Strategy Sub-Committee.

4.3 The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy 2011-2016 was introduced in June 2011. The review team saw an evidence trail of discussion within the University and one of the faculties to show how it had influenced the overarching strategy and how it had begun the process of aligning its own learning and teaching strategy to it. However, the team noted that an evaluation of the progress of faculty alignment with the University strategy found that some faculties had yet to complete this process. A check of the faculty websites confirmed this position. As a consequence, the review team **affirms** the action being taken by the University to align the faculty learning and teaching strategies with the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy 2011-16.

4.4 The University's process of programme approval, annual reflection and periodic review has been reviewed to give greater emphasis on quality and enhancement and the sharing of good practice. The review team saw evidence that good practice emerging from Annual Reflection is considered at an institutional level at meetings of the Enhancement and Strategy Sub-Committee. Similarly, the team saw evidence that periodic review reports discussed developments and enhancements to the learning experience, although there is not an explicit section on enhancement in the report.

4.5 Good practice is disseminated across the University through a number of initiatives including an in-house news publication, an annual learning and teaching conference, faculty learning and teaching events, department teaching forums, and a web-based toolkit for good practice teaching.

4.6 The review team noted that the external examiner report form does not prompt external examiners to comment on any enhancements or features of good practice. Similarly, the team noted that a paper for QSSC summarising issues arising from external examiner reports from 2011-12 did not include enhancement or good practice items for discussion.

4.7 The University claims to be in the process of developing innovative ways of engaging students with quality enhancement. Its partnership approach with students is exemplified by the appointment of the Student Ambassador for Learning and Teaching

scheme. Students are appointed by interview for the role and are then fully involved in all enhancement projects as equal partners, for example, Project 2012 and different strands relating to the Learning and Teaching Strategy 2011-16. The team heard evidence that Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching were currently engaged with enhancement projects on curriculum development. The team considered the involvement of Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching in the processes for enhancing the quality of the student experience to be a **feature of good practice**.

4.8 The new Learning and Teaching Strategy retains the Sheffield Graduate as a framework for the enhancement of teaching and learning. The concept of a Sheffield Graduate is used for a number of initiatives, namely The Sheffield Graduate Award, The Sheffield Graduate Development Plan and the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health's The Sheffield Clinical Graduate. The aspiration of the University is to increase the number of students who achieve the graduate award and to facilitate faculties in providing extra-curricular opportunities to support students to achieve the Sheffield Graduate attributes.

## 5 Thematic element

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for especial attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2012-13 there is a choice of two themes: First Year Student Experience or Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement.

### Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The review team investigated student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the University of Sheffield.

The University places a high value on student engagement and works closely with the Students' Union to ensure that students are partners in their education. The University employs a wide range of mechanisms to involve students at all levels of the University in quality assurance and enhancement. The University gains feedback on and learns from their experience through a wide variety of arrangements. Students felt informed about the actions taken by the University in response to their input.

#### Innovations in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement

5.1 The University claims to be in the process of developing innovative ways of engaging students with quality enhancement. Its partnership approach with students is exemplified by the appointment of the Student Ambassador for Learning and Teaching scheme. These Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching can work at department, faculty or University level to deliver projects to improve learning and teaching. Student Ambassadors for Learning and Teaching receive full training for the role. The University clearly regards them as a major element of its approach to student engagement. They have made important contributions to a number of projects including Project 2012, the University's proposition to students on the introduction of tuition fees for entry in 2012.

5.2 As well as SSCs at department level, there are Faculty Forums in all faculties drawing on students from SSC members. These Forums are intended to provide students with the opportunity for discussion and engagement at faculty level. They are generally student-led with some staff involvement. Students feed back to their departments. Students commented positively on the arrangements although the Students' Union had commented that in order to be more effective there needed to be more clarity on the remit and role of

faculty representatives at the meetings. Faculty forums for postgraduate research students have recently been established.

5.3 Students are involved in the Periodic Review process. There are two student reviewers on each review panel for which they receive training. When asked, students were positive about their experience.

5.4 While it is not the University's general policy to involve students in the Annual Reflection process for taught programmes, students have been involved in Annual Reflections in the International Faculty and for professional reasons in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health. For postgraduate research provision, it is University policy to involve departmental research student representatives in Annual Reflection. In response to this emerging practice, QSSC has asked the Student Engagement Working Group to consider whether student involvement in Annual Reflection should be extended.

### **Staff experience of/participation in student involvement in quality**

5.5 There is a buddying scheme between Student Union Officers and Pro Vice-Chancellors who meet every month. Student representatives thought the buddying system worked well and allowed discussion of issues of interest that could then be followed up.

5.6 The Inclusive Learning and Teaching Project is an example of a large scale University project involving both students and staff. In the region of 400 students and 500 staff were involved in this project to provide guidance documents on a more inclusive learning and teaching environment.

5.7 SSCs are well established at departmental level with over 500 students sitting on committees across the academic departments of the University. In many departments SSCs are chaired by students or chaired on an alternating basis by a student and a staff member. Each SSC has a staff committee coordinator who is known to the Students' Union as well as being publicised to students within the department. The SWS suggests that the role could be made more effective if it was more clearly defined through, for example, a role description.

### **Acting on student contributions and 'closing the feedback loop'**

5.8 The review team heard from students that they felt listened to by the University and its staff and that they saw the results of their feedback.

5.9 The University takes a thorough approach to the analysis of external surveys, such as the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, and benchmarks its performance against comparable institutions. Any resulting action plans are discussed at SSCs to engage students.

5.10 The Student Services Department has around 40 separate mechanisms for evaluating their services as well as an annual survey of all students on their satisfaction. An annual response is published on their website. There is a Service Improvement Team within Student Services to oversee improvement in the quality of the services. There is a Holistic Evaluation Toolkit aimed at providing a more student-centred approach to evaluating the impact of service provision. The Student Services Information Desk (SSiD) is the University's 'one-stop shop' for student-related services and information. SSiD has recently introduced a customer feedback system so that students can provide immediate feedback by email to staff on their service. The review team considered that Student Services seemed particularly prepared to seek and use feedback in quality assuring their provision. The review team saw evidence of user groups with significant student representation which gathered feedback on



particular aspects of University provision and which regularly published responses to student feedback via the website, for example, the Library Users Group.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality/pages/default.aspx).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/default.aspx).

**Academic Infrastructure** Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the **Code of practice**. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

**academic standards** The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

**Code of practice** *The Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

**credit(s)** A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education programmes of study, expressed as 'numbers of credits' at a specific level.

**enhancement** Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

**feature of good practice** A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

**framework** A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

**framework for higher education qualifications** A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*.

**learning opportunities** The provision made for students' learning, including planned **programmes of study**, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios) and staff development.

**learning outcome** What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

**operational definition** A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

**programme (of study)** An approved course of study which provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

**programme specifications** Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of **programmes of study**, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

**public information** Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

**Quality Code** Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

**subject benchmark statement** A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

**threshold academic standard** The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

**widening participation** Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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